# COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY INSPECTOR GENERAL AGENCY
TRAINING DIVISION
5500 21st STREET, SUITE 2108
FORT BELVOIR, VIRGINIA 22060-5935
April 2004

# Table of Contents

## Communicative Skills

# Introduction

## Communicative Skills

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this Student Text is to assist Inspectors General (IGs) at all levels in developing written products and conducting interviews and sensing sessions.

2. **IGs as Communicators:** IGs are in the communication business. An IG's ability to communicate effectively is essential to the success of the IG system. This Student Text contains three chapters that will assist IGs in communicating effectively and clearly as they gather, and then report upon, information of all types. The three chapters address the writing process, interviews, and sensing sessions. These chapters will help to improve the effectiveness of IGs in these commonly used communicative skills.

This text further assumes that an IG has achieved a certain level of expertise and experience in the use of basic communicative methods such as speaking and writing. This text draws from a variety of Army and civilian sources, but the IG must not consider this text to be all-inclusive. Other resources exist that address writing and speaking in greater depth, and IGs should explore these resources as necessary. The ultimate purpose of this guide is to help already accomplished communicators sharpen further their communicative skills.

In addition to discussing the writing process, this Student Text will explore in detail two of the five techniques (or domains) of information gathering available to an IG as mentioned above. For further information on the other information-gathering domains, see the U.S. Army Inspector General School's two primary doctrinal publications: The Inspections Guide and The Assistance and Investigations Guide. This text serves to supplement -- and complement -- these two doctrinal publications.

3. **The Information-Gathering Domains:** IG inspectors have five information-gathering techniques -- or domains -- available to them. These domains apply to the Inspections, Investigations, and Assistance functions and represent the primary methods that IGs use to gather information about an Inspection topic, an Investigation allegation, or an Assistance case. The five domains are as follows:

a. Interviews with key leaders or other personnel.

b. Sensing sessions with enlisted soldiers, NCOs, and officers.

c. Reviews of documents such as Standing Operating Procedures (SOPs), policy letters, post regulations, training-guidance memorandums, documentary evidence, and so on.

d. Observation of major training events, live-fire exercises, after-action reviews, inspections, and so on.

e. Surveys and Questionnaires (normally used for topics that require a sampling of a unit's population).

Inspections usually apply all five of these domains while Investigations principally employ interviews. The way an interview occurs in an Inspection differs from an interview conducted during an Investigation. However, the same basic principles apply. An IG conducting Assistance often conducts walk-in interviews and -- on occasion -- scheduled sensing sessions. All three IG functions employ document review to some degree; however, observation most often occurs during Inspections. This Student Text will focus on the two domains that require the most polished of communicative skills -- interviews and sensing sessions.

# Chapter 2

## Conducting Interviews

1. **Purpose:** This chapter outlines a general approach to conducting interviews.

2. **The Purpose of Interviews:** An interview is an information-gathering technique designed to allow an IG to gather information through one-on-one, face-to-face contact with an individual. Interviews are not interrogations.

3. **Types of Interviews:** Two types of interviews exist: scheduled and walk-in. Scheduled interviews normally occur during Inspections and Investigations. Walk-in -- or unscheduled -- interviews normally occur as part of the assistance function (for example, when someone comes to the IG office to lodge a complaint, make an allegation, or request assistance). The principle difference between a scheduled interview and a walk-in interview is the amount of preparation on the IG's part. Scheduled interviews will follow a well-prepared interrogatory (or list of questions) while walk-in interviews will result in an IG developing on-the-spot questions to gather the information necessary to assist the individual. Scheduled interviews may also occur by telephone and require a certain level of coordination. The IG must pre-brief the person he or she plans to interview by telephone on the purpose, time, and location of the interview in addition to conducting a pre-interview telephone-line and tape-recorder check as necessary.

4. **Setting the Conditions for an Interview:** Scheduled interviews often last one hour, but the actual duration will vary based upon the amount of information required. The same notion applies to walk-in interviews. The IG should always conduct the interview in a private place that will be free from interruptions and will readily set the interviewee at ease. If necessary, place "do not disturb" signs on the door or find a place that is free from distracting telephone calls or repeated interruptions by co-workers or subordinates. Always be friendly and personable to the person you are about to interview. This behavior will set the person at ease. For a walk-in interview, greet the person by coming from behind your desk with your hand extended and a smile on your face. IGs may also conduct interviews in pairs; one IG can record the information while the other IG asks the questions. Interviews conducted as part of an Investigation (sworn, recorded testimony) will normally occur with two IGs present.

5. **Introduction:** Scheduled interviews during Inspections will begin with a prepared introduction recited by the IG to the interviewee. This introduction will explain the purpose, scope, and ground rules of the interview. The introduction will also explain the notion of confidentiality and set a prescribed time limit for the interview (see the example at the end of this chapter). Scheduled interviews for Investigations will begin with a read-in briefing and end with a read-out briefing (see The Assistance and Investigations Guide). Walk-in interviews will not normally have a prepared introduction; however, IGs who routinely work in the Assistance function and receive Inspector General Action Requests (IGARs) on a daily basis may develop and use a standard introduction that explains the type of information required for the DA Form 1559 and what information the complainant must provide to allow the IG to solve the problem.

6. **Conducting the Interview:** Immediately following the introduction or read-in briefing, scheduled interviews will continue with the prepared questions (for an Inspection) or interrogatory (for an Investigation). Develop no more than 10 questions since time will not allow for many more. The IG must always ask one question at a time and present the questions in a logical sequence. Give the interviewee enough time to answer each question thoroughly. Do not ask bullying or trick questions. The questions should be open-ended and promote discussion. Close-ended questions -- questions that normally require only a yes or no response -- will often keep the IG from determining the root cause or deeper meaning of a problem or issue. The IG should ask each question in a friendly yet business-like manner, and the IG should probe for answers only as far as is necessary to obtain the required information. The same principles apply to walk-in interviews -- even though the IG will not be using prepared questions to gather information. The following are some helpful hints about conducting interviews:

a. Establish rapport. Rapport is a relationship built on harmony and will immediately set the interviewee at ease. The interview will proceed well if the interviewee senses that the IG is someone with whom he or she can speak easily and comfortably.

b. Maintain Control. The IG must always control the interview and not allow the discussion to digress to irrelevant issues. IGs can maintain control without being overly assertive. Instead, the IG can simply keep re-directing the discussion back to the interview's primary topic.

c. Avoid Arguing. An IG must not argue with the interviewee even if he or she disagrees strongly with what the person says. The IG's mission is to gather the required information and to remain as neutral as possible.

d. Maintain Strict Impartiality. IGs should never make value judgments about the information gathered. In cases where an interviewee misquotes a regulation or standard, the IG can -- and should -- intercede and correct the error as part of the IG's Teach-and-Train function. Likewise, IGs should not proffer an opinion about anything an interviewee says or commiserate with that person on any real or perceived injustices.

e. Do Not Try to Solve Problems on the Spot. Numerous issues and personal problems may arise during the course of scheduled interviews. The interviewee may attempt to solicit the IG for a response or an agreement to fix a problem as soon as possible. This same notion especially applies to walk-in interviews for assistance. In all circumstances, IGs must refrain from attempting to solve a problem on the spot or promising that he or she will get something "fixed" for the interviewee. If the IG is unable to comply with that promise at a later date, the IG's credibility will invariably suffer.

f. Do Not Allow the Interviewee to Interview You. If the interviewee begins asking questions of the IG such as "What do you think of this situation?" or "Would you put up with that stuff?", the IG should ignore the queries and continue with the questioning. If the interviewee persists, then the IG should simply state that he or she is not familiar enough with the situation to render an opinion. An opinion proffered by an IG may compromise that IG's impartiality at a later date.

g. Be a Good Listener. The quality of an IG's listening can actually control another person's ability to talk. Listening is an active process in which the IG thinks

ahead, weighs the points, reviews the information already covered, and searches the information for greater meaning. Most people need some feedback to ensure that the IG is being attentive and hearing them. If the IG stares at the responding interviewee impassively, the interviewee will be less forthcoming and feel that what he or she is saying is unimportant. The IG should be a positive listener who uses non-judgmental expressions or gestures that show interest or understanding. A small gesture such as a nod, a smile, or eye contact are often enough to maintain rapport with the interviewee. The IG may also try neutral phrases such as "Tell me more about it" or "Go on and explain what happened next."

h. Silence. Silent pauses during an interview should never embarrass an IG. A respect for silence is often helpful and can allow both the interviewer and interviewee to collect their thoughts before proceeding. A hasty interruption on the IG's part may leave an important part of the story forever untold. The IG may also use silence to force a response from a reluctant interviewee. If the IG must ask a lot of questions in order to keep the person providing information, the interview can quickly become an interrogation.

i. Accept the Interviewee's Feelings. IGs must learn to accept a person's feelings during an interview and avoid passing judgment on someone. Gather only the facts, and do not dole out false reassurances about anything.

j. Make Perception Checks. A perception check is a test that the IG can conduct to ensure that he or she has interpreted the other person's feelings about a particular fact or issue correctly. The interviewee's information may suggest displeasure with a person or system even though the person never actually states those feelings as a fact. The IG can clarify this perception by simply making a statement such as "I am under the impression that you are upset with what your commander is doing." The interviewee will either confirm or deny the statement.

7. **Ending the Interview:** For scheduled interviews conducted as part of an Investigation (sworn, recorded testimony), the IG should follow the read-out briefing listed in The Assistance and Investigations Guide. All other interviews -- scheduled and walk-in -- should conclude with the IG doing the following:

a. Informing the interviewee that he or she has provided all of the required information.

b. Asking if the interviewee has anything else to offer.

c. Establishing a continuation date and time if a follow-up interview is necessary.

d. Reminding the interviewee of confidentiality.

e. Thanking the interviewee for his or her time and for providing the information.

f. Avoiding making promises or commitments.

8. **Sample Introduction for a Scheduled Interview:** The following sample introduction is for a scheduled interview conducted as part of an inspection on Risk Management:

Risk Management Interview Introduction

Hello, I am _____ of the Department of the Army Inspector General (DAIG) office.

- I am talking to you as part of an inspection that the DAIG is doing on the Army's Risk Management process to determine that process's integration and institutionalization in training, operations, and high-risk training. The Chief of Staff of the Army directed this inspection.

- I am interviewing you to get your thoughts and opinions about Risk Management training and its function in your on- and off-duty activities. We will combine what you tell us with what others say. We will look for patterns and trends in the collective comments and perceptions and then report that information to The Inspector General of the Army and other senior Army leaders.

- We define Risk Management as: The process of identifying, assessing, and controlling risk arising from operational factors and making decisions that balance risk cost with mission benefits (AR 385-10, The Army Safety Program).

- This command may describe the program by a different name or term. If so, please let me know. If you do not recognize a term, please ask.

- I want you to feel perfectly at ease and talk freely with me. To this end, I propose these ground rules:

    - I am interested specifically in your thoughts, feelings, opinions, or anything relevant to the subject.

    - I will take notes to capture the essence of what you say. However, I will not use your name or in any way attribute what you say to who you are. I am sensitive to the fact that you might not talk as freely about things if you think your comments could later be attributed to you in a negative way.

    - The only time that I might attribute a name to a statement is in the unlikely event that you indicate that you have evidence of a crime, a security violation, or a serious breach of integrity. If that happens, I will discuss that issue with you immediately following this interview.

    - I will take about one hour of your time.

- Do you have any questions about the ground rules? Great! Let's begin!

# Chapter 1

## The Writing Process

1. **Purpose:** This chapter assists Inspectors General (IGs) at all levels in developing, crafting, and producing effective written products as required when engaging in either the Assistance, Investigations, or Inspections function.

2. **The Purpose of Writing:** As IGs, you will write to inform your intended audience of something that they do not already know, or you will write to defend a particular point of view or finding. In either case, IGs must write to transmit their message clearly and concisely and in a manner and style that is clear and generally free of spelling and grammar errors.

3. **The Army Writing Style:** IGs communicate effectively in written form by adhering to a writing style (long advocated by the Army) that is not dense with complicated or obscure words or that relies on long, complex sentences. IGs must write using clear, short sentences as much as possible. Avoid using the passive voice since this writing style robs verbs of their subjects, muddles meaning, and avoids responsibility. Be aware of grammar and such things as punctuation and pronoun reference pitfalls. In effect, IGs should develop a writing style that will allow the reading audience to glide through the text with minimal distraction or confusion. See paragraph 1-44 in AR 25-50, Preparing and Managing Correspondence, and DA PAM 600-67, Effective Writing for Army Leaders, for further information on the Army writing style.

4. **Approaching the Writing Task:** Most IGs feels that writing is an ominous task. They approach the writing of Reports of Investigation (ROIs), Inspections Findings Sections, and so on as an exceedingly complex, linear process. Actually, the opposite is true. Writing can be as free flowing and without form as necessary -- until the writer has to package the final product using the prescribed format or outline. Until that point, an IG's approach to writing depends upon the individual IG. When first approaching the writing topic, the writer should do the following:

a. Explore what you already know or believe about the topic at hand. Reflect on the subject abstractly or engage in free writing in an attempt to capture these random thoughts.

b. Clarify the writing task.

c. Develop a writing plan that allows you sufficient time to develop and then revise at least two drafts of the written product before considering the task complete. In effect, your writing plan should consider these six basic steps:

(1) Pre-writing and research (includes delving into -- and studying -- your sources)

(2) Thesis development

(3) First draft development

(4) Second draft development

(5) Final editing and grammatical check

(6) Production of the final product in the prescribed format (Inspections findings section, Report of Investigation, and so on).

The actual steps that an IG uses to write will vary from person to person. The writer must keep in mind his or her time constraints and approach the writing task accordingly. Some writing assignments may be short fused while others will afford the writer sufficient time to do a thorough job of developing the written product. In any case, the final goal is a solid, well-crafted, and well-packaged written product that will effectively communicate its point to the desired audience.

5. **The Writing Plan:** An explanation for each of the six steps in a standard writing plan is as follows:

a. **Pre-Writing:** IGs should first approach any writing task without worrying about form, style, or content. The first step of the writing process should be to understand the requirement and what the writer must achieve with the final product. This step is called pre-writing and requires the writer to explore the topic mentally and reflect upon the writing task at hand. Pre-writing may also include the writing down of random thoughts and ideas about the topic without regard to form or structure (sometimes called mind-mapping in the Army). Naturally, pre-writing means that the writer is willing to take the time to develop the essay, paper, findings section, or report and not simply bang out a hasty product on the computer. Waiting until the last minute to generate a written product that requires thought, illustration, and analysis will almost certainly spell disaster for the writer. Setting aside the time to do it properly is essential. Pre-writing will soon give way to some sense of what the final product will resemble in both substance and structure.

b. **Developing a Thesis:** Most written products that an IG will produce require a bottom-line-up-front (BLUF in Army parlance). In effect, IGs will write to support a thesis or BLUF. This form of writing is generally known as the argumentative style in which a writer presents a thesis and then supports it through illustrations, analysis, and other types of information. Remember that an argument does not necessarily imply a combative attitude; instead, the writer is rationally and soberly defending his or her position as stated in the thesis.

Thesis development can be difficult if the writer has not formed a complete opinion about the subject based upon available evidence or supporting information. Therefore, most writers develop a draft thesis prior to crafting the written product with the intent of revisiting that thesis later to revise it and -- in some cases -- change their position completely. Resultantly, all IGs should consider their thesis statements to be in draft form until they develop a final draft of the entire written product.

But what is a thesis statement? The thesis statement is the main point of the written product and shapes the form and content of that product. Generally, thesis statements are assertions that normally comprise a fact and an opinion. In other words, the fact that the writer is defending in the essay also includes the writer's opinion about

that fact. In a formulaic sense, the thesis can appear as: I think x because of a, b, and c. The x is the fact borne from the writer's opinion and analysis of the available evidence, and the a, b, and c portions are the supporting facts or evidence that reinforce that particular stance. By shaping the draft thesis in this manner, the writer can capture the main point of the written product and then offer a preview of the evidence that will support that main point (or thesis) by hinting at that evidence directly in the thesis statement. Naturally, the thesis statement will not begin with "I think" but will instead take the form of an assertion. Here's an example:

The surprise German counterattack through the Ardennes forest in December 1944 **(fact)** resulted from an intelligence failure **(opinion, or x)** caused by **(a)** the senior leadership's overly optimistic view that the Germans were beaten, **(b)** needless bickering and second-guessing among the intelligence chiefs at the Army Group and Army levels, and **(c)** poor analysis of the information gathered by numerous front-line patrols in the days immediately preceding the attack.

This example clearly illustrates the point made by Irene L. Clark of the University of Southern California that: "The thesis serves as a unifying thread throughout the essay, tying together details and examples" (*Writing About Diversity: An Argument Reader and Guide*, Harcourt-Brace College Publishers, Fort Worth, Texas, 1994). This thesis states the fact, the writer's opinion, and then outlines the evidence that supports that opinion (an intelligence failure). In effect, the thesis has helped to establish the basic structure of the final written product.

Infinite possibilities for thesis statements exist, so the writer should not mechanically attempt to conform to any particular formula. However, structuring a draft thesis in a certain way can help the writer visualize the essay or written product before actually creating the first draft of that product.

After drafting the thesis statement, the writer should develop an outline of the written product so that he or she can continue the writing process with some clear sense of direction. This outline will give the written product its intended structure.

c. **Developing First and Second Draft Versions of the Written Product:** The writer should develop the first draft of the written product without worrying about mistakes such as grammar errors or stylistic problems. The IG can fix those problems when editing and refining the first and second draft versions of the document. However, the writer must select some basic structure before writing that first draft. Many written products that an IG will craft often have their own pre-established structures such as an Inspection findings section or a Report of Investigation (ROI). However, most of these formats will generally follow a basic pattern as follows:

(1) **Introduction:** The written product will usually begin with an introductory paragraph that presents the written product's main point or thesis. Depending upon the written product's purpose and intended audience, the introduction can take on many forms such as presenting a problem or issue; providing historical context; expounding upon the particular importance of the topic; or introducing the topic through a lively anecdote, vignette, or description. Above all, the introduction's primary purpose is to lead the audience into the written product, give them a clear sense of the subject, and present the thesis statement. The introduction and thesis statement will always exist in draft form until the writer completes the final draft of the written product.

The writer must go back and ensure that what he or she supports in the main body of the essay is logically linked to the assertion made in the thesis statement.

(2) **Main Body:** The main body of the written product consists of the individual paragraphs that will support the thesis. The writer must develop at least one paragraph for each point or idea (the a, b, c, etc.) that he or she wants to make or introduce to support the thesis (some evidence may take several paragraphs to discuss). The main paragraph of each point discussed must have a topic sentence that captures -- like a thesis statement -- the main point of the evidence presented. In effect, topic sentences for paragraphs are similar to thesis statements for essays; each one captures the main point of what the writer wants to discuss so that the reading audience is not struggling to determine where the written product is going or what it is trying to achieve. The main body of the written product -- the supporting paragraphs -- develops the main thesis using various strategies such as analysis, comparison-contrast, illustrations, and other types of information. In IG Inspection Reports, each Findings Section has an Inspection Results portion, which represents the main body of that five-part written product; this Inspection Results portion outlines the evidence that supports the finding statement (or thesis) for that particular Findings Section. Likewise, the main body of an IG Report of Investigation or Investigative Inquiry (ROI / ROII) will be the portion that discusses – and logically sequences – the evidence that support's the IG investigator's conclusion of substantiated or not substantiated.

(3) **Conclusion:** The written product ends with a concluding paragraph that redirects the audience's attention back to the main point. The conclusion may reaffirm the main point, pose a question, summarize what the writer has just stated, or elaborate upon the significance of the topic that the writer has just discussed. More captivating conclusions will offer the reading audience an illustrative anecdote or vignette that further reinforces the main point outlined in the thesis statement.

Once the first draft is complete, the writer should review the written product for content, meaning, accuracy, and completeness. Changes made to the first draft will lead to a second draft. Once again, the IG should review the second draft for structure and content but also with an eye toward finding and correcting any nagging spelling and grammatical errors. Seeking out a peer to review the second draft is an excellent idea since a writer can sometimes get too close to his or her own work and not be able to see any problems with the text clearly.

d. **Final Editing:** Once the writer is satisfied that the written product successfully communicates -- or argues for -- the writer's main point, then the writer should carefully review the text for all remaining grammar errors. Computer spell- and grammar-checking programs greatly facilitate this process; however, not all grammar recommendations made by the computer are correct. The writer is ultimately responsible for the content of the final written product. Don't let a computer do the thinking for you.

e. **Producing the Final Product:** This final step can occur as part of the final editing process or later as a separate step. The writer must now package the written product in final form using the prescribed format. For example, if the writer is developing a findings section for an Inspection report, the writer will state the thesis up front as the Finding Statement followed by a paragraph that outlines the applicable standards. The Inspection Results and Root Cause come next and actually represent the main body of the written product. The recommendations come last and serve as the conclusion.

6. **Style and Grammar Tips:** The following style and grammar tips will assist IGs from making common writing errors.

a. Passive Voice. Passive voice -- as opposed to the active voice -- robs the verb of its subject and inverts the order of a sentence by placing the subject after the verb. Passive voice allows the subject to escape responsibility for the verb and the thing acted upon through that verb -- the direct object. In addition, passive voice increases the number of words in a sentence and is therefore less direct and more verbose. The active voice increases the tempo of the written language and encourages a clearer, more immediate understanding of the text. An IG can identify passive voice in a sentence by looking for three distinct things:

(1) Some form of the verb *to be* (is, was, been, etc.)

(2) A past participle of some verb (usually ending in *-ed* such as *chopped, whipped,* and *kicked* or as an irregular past-participle verb form such as *seen* or *written*)

(3) The subject of the sentence follows the verb or is missing completely

Consider this example of the passive voice:

The dog was kicked by John.

The sentence is written in the passive voice because we have a form of the verb *to be* (was), a past participle of a verb (kicked), and the subject following the verb (John). The dog is the receiver of the action -- the direct object -- and should follow the verb. To convert this sentence to the active voice, place the subject (John) before the verb (kicked).

John kicked the dog.

The sentence is now in the active voice because the subject precedes the verb. Notice how the words *was* and *by* disappeared, making the sentence shorter and more direct. Some passive-voice sentences will also suffer from the absence of a subject.

The dog was kicked.

To convert this sentence into the active voice, the writer will have to name the otherwise unknown subject (John) in the sentence. A sentence written in this manner allows the subject to escape responsibility for the action. Consider this example:

The critical memorandum was lost.

The person who lost this important piece of paper is clearly avoiding responsibility by not naming himself or herself as the subject. Accepting responsibility in the active voice would read as follows:

Senator Jones lost the critical memorandum.

Since leaders in the Army routinely accept responsibility for their actions, the use of the active voice in Army writing is essential.

b. Pronoun Reference. Many writers often use the pronoun *this* without naming a clear antecedent. This failure to name an antecedent routinely creates confusion in the text and causes the reader to refer back to previous sentences to determine what *this* really is. Consider the following example:

Many soldiers failed to complete the obstacle course on time. *This* resulted in several soldiers receiving a poor grade on their Soldier Skills test.

The pronoun *This* in the second sentence vaguely refers to the main idea in the first sentence. But to what does *this* really refer? To ensure clarity, insert a clear antecedent for *this* immediately following the pronoun.

Many soldiers failed to complete the obstacle course on time. *This* failure resulted in several soldiers receiving a poor grade on their Soldier Skills test.

The pronoun *This* now clearly refers to the notion of failure outlined in the first sentence. Always try to insert a clear reference after the pronoun *this* to ensure absolute clarity and to keep the reader from guessing.

c. Forming the Possessive for Singular Nouns Ending in *s*. The standard rule for forming the possessive for singular nouns ending in *s* is simply to add *'s* to the end. Here are some examples:

Charles's friend

Burns's poems

Ross's rifle

Dickens's novels

d. The Use of *It's* and *Its*. A common error is to write *it's* for *its* or vice versa. *It's* is a contraction meaning *it is*, and *its* is a possessive form. Consider this example:

*It's* (it is) a wise dog that scratches *its* (possessive) own fleas.

e. Commas for Items in a Series. In a series of three or more items, use a comma after each item except for the last one. Here are some examples:

red, white, and blue

gold, silver, or copper

If one or more of the items in a series has internal punctuation such as a comma, use a semi-colon to separate the items.

During the inspection, the IG discovered a general willingness to comply with the standard; a desire to excel at all things within the battalion; and a patriotic fervor

that resulted in the soldiers painting each rock in the unit area a bright red, white, and blue.

f. The Use of Commas with Dates. Dates usually contain parenthetic words or figures. The correct punctuation is as follows:

April 6, 2003

February to July, 2002

Wednesday, November 11, 1999

In the Army, we often invert the date to read as day-month-year. In these cases, punctuation is not necessary.

20 July 1944

g. Comma Splices. Comma splices normally occur when a writer joins two complete, independent sentences with a comma. In many cases, comma splices occur using a conjunctive adverb such as *likewise*, *however*, *moreover*, etc. Here is an example of a comma splice that uses a conjunctive adverb:

The snow fell quickly today, however, the snowplows cleared the streets within an hour.

The two sentences are spliced together inappropriately using the conjunctive adverb of *however*. To correct this fault, a semi-colon belongs after the word today -- or the two sentences should be separated.

The snow fell quickly today; however, the snowplows cleared the streets within an hour.

The snow fell quickly today. However, the snowplows cleared the streets within an hour.

h. Coordinating Conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions help to connect two closely related -- but independent -- sentences. There are seven coordinating conjunctions, and each one requires a comma before it when connecting two separate sentences. The seven coordinating conjunctions are as follows: *and, or, nor, for, yet, but,* and *so*.

The men started to chase Bill, so he turned and ran away.

Frank liked Bill's poems, but he preferred to read short stories.

If necessary, each of these two sentences could be split into two separate sentences and omit the coordinating conjunction.

The men started to chase Bill. He turned and ran away.

Frank liked Bill's poems. He preferred to read short stories.

i. Dashes. A dash represents an abrupt break or interruption in a sentence. A dash is a mark of separation stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses. Use dashes sparingly and for effect.

His first thought on getting out of bed -- if he had any thought at all -- was to get back in again.

The rear axle began to make a noise -- a grinding, chattering, teeth-gritting rasp.

The style and grammar tips listed above represent some of the more common grammar and stylistic errors made by writers today. For a more complete guide to grammar and writing style, refer to The Elements of Style by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White. MacMillan Publishing Company in New York routinely keeps this book in print; MacMillan produced a Third Edition in 1979.

# Chapter 3

## Conducting Sensing Sessions

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance on how to conduct a sensing session.

2. **Discussion:** Sensing sessions are group interviews that can serve as an excellent source of information. The objective of a sensing session is to provide IGs with the perceptions and opinions of the group's members (soldiers, civilians, family members, and so on). If conducted properly, the group that the team is sensing will feel comfortable and share some critical opinions and observations about a certain topic.

The key to a successful sensing session is to make the group feel comfortable -- even though the facilitator may be a lieutenant colonel while the group members are junior enlisted soldiers. The facilitator must not assert his or her authority directly but instead do so in a subtle manner through body language and tone. The sensing-session group will understand that authority if the facilitator conducts the session professionally and treats everyone with equal respect throughout the session. The key features of a successful sensing session are as follows:

a. Location: The setting should be in a classroom-sized environment and -- preferably -- away from the unit. The location must support the notion of anonymity since the soldiers you are sensing will expect some measure of confidentiality. The preferred structure of the room is to arrange the chairs into a "U" shape so that the facilitator and recorder can position themselves at the open mouth of the "U." All participants should be able to see each other. Avoid using a classroom set-up with tables or desks since the participants cannot see each other and the facilitator will have difficulty maintaining eye contact.

b. Group Size and Composition: A successful sensing session cannot occur with fewer than eight (8) people. The preferred group size is 15 since the facilitator cannot maintain eye contact or rapport with a group larger than 15. Groups smaller than eight people will not support -- in each participant's mind -- the IG's promise of anonymity and will normally devolve into a discussion between the facilitator and one or two of the more outspoken participants.

The unit will select the participants based upon criteria established by the IG. The IG must not, under any circumstances, select the participants by name. The IG should stratify the group by unit, gender, race, and grade as required. The facilitator must not allow members of the group's chain of command to observe the session. Likewise, the facilitator must ensure that none of the group members shares a supervisory relationship with another member.

c. Preparation: The facilitator must develop no more than 10 open-ended questions that will help capture the desired information about the topic. Close-ended questions require yes or no responses and will not allow the IG to get at the root cause of the problem or any other underlying issues.

The facilitator must also consider the group's composition when developing sensing-session questions. The questions that the facilitator asks a group of enlisted soldiers will vary from the questions posed to a group of junior officers. In addition, he facilitator must know and understand the questions thoroughly. The facilitator must be prepared to allow the discussion to ramble a bit and not simply force the group to answer a series of questions in succession. The facilitator should ultimately ensure that the group answers all of the questions but within the context of a free-flowing discussion.

d. Recording: Another team member, who will serve as a recorder (or scribe) for the session, must accompany the facilitator. The recorder will take notes to capture the essence of what the group members say without quoting anyone directly. The recorder will never list the names of those present for the session. Also, some situations may occur when the facilitator must also serve as the recorder.

e. Introduction: The facilitator must have on hand a prepared introduction or statement that captures the purpose and intent behind the session. Likewise, this introduction must establish ground rules for the session such as confidentiality, actions taken if a soldier inadvertently gives evidence of a crime, and so on. The introduction must mention that the IG is interested in the group's opinions and perceptions about the topic at hand and that the recorder will only take notes to capture the essence of what the group says but will not take names (see the end of this chapter for a sample introduction).

f. Conducting the Session: The session should not last for more than two hours since most of the group members will become fidgety and fatigued by this time. The preferred time for a sensing session is 90 minutes. The facilitator can begin with some humor but should do so only if the comments do not compromise the seriousness or professional nature of the session.

The facilitator should ask the first question and then allow the discussion to develop naturally. Once the facilitator obtains the required information from the group concerning the first question, the facilitator can begin with the next question. Asking the questions in sequence is less important than gathering the required information. A rambling, naturally developing discussion may ultimately answer all of the questions, so the recorder has to know how to capture the relevant information as it surfaces. When the discussion begins to wind down, the facilitator can ask those questions not answered during the larger discussion.

The facilitator must make every effort to involve everyone in the discussion and treat each group member's comments as valid and useful -- even if some of the comments may seem strikingly ridiculous. In effect, the facilitator must never "shut out" a participant by evaluating someone's statement in front of the group. The facilitator and the recorder must be good, active listeners and show interest in the comments made by the group's members. The recorder may also interject and ask follow-up questions or request clarification as necessary. The recorder may also summarize the feedback periodically to ensure that he or she has captured the group's thoughts accurately.

Since the sensing session is not a complaint session, the facilitator must remind the group to hold all complaints or personal issues until after the sensing session (if complaints begin to surface). The IG must never make a commitment or a promise during the session -- even if pressed to do so by a member of the group.

The facilitator must also be prepared to teach and train the group on aspects of the topic that the group may not understand. If a member of the group makes an incorrect statement about an existing standard or regulation, the facilitator should correct the individual to ensure that the group does not consider the person's statement to be correct and thus perpetuate some misinformation.

g. Ending the Session: The facilitator should begin ending (or winding down) the session 15 minutes before the scheduled completion time. If the group answers all questions before the time is over, then release the group early. Most of these soldiers will have other things to do and will appreciate the extra time. The facilitator or recorder should summarize the key points made during the session before releasing the group. Be sure to thank them for their assistance and remind them one last time about the issue of confidentiality.

3. **Sample Introduction for a Sensing Session:** The following sample introduction is for a sensing session conducted as part of an inspection on Risk Management:

Risk Management Sensing Session Introduction

Hello, I am _____ of the Department of the Army Inspector General (DAIG) office. This is my partner, _____.

- We are talking to you as part of an inspection that the DAIG is doing on the Army's Risk Management process to determine the process's integration and institutionalization in training, operations, and high-risk training. The Chief of Staff of the Army directed this inspection.

- We are interviewing you to get your thoughts and opinions about Risk Management training and its function in your on- and off-duty activities. We will combine what you tell us with what other groups say. We will look for patterns and trends in the collective comments and perceptions and then report that information to The Inspector General of the Army and other senior Army leaders.

- We define Risk Management as "The process of identifying, assessing, and controlling risk arising from operational factors and making decisions that balance risk cost with mission benefits" (AR 385-10, The Army Safety Program).

- Your unit may describe the program by a different name or term. If so, please let us know. If you do not recognize a term, please ask.

- We want you to feel perfectly at ease and talk freely with us. To this end, we propose these ground rules:

    - We are interested specifically in your thoughts, feelings, opinions, or anything relevant to the subject. Speak for yourself and avoid speeches or philosophical statements.

    - Respond to the questions we ask, stay on track, and avoid sidebars with your neighbors.

- Keep each other's input confidential; what is said in this room stays in this room.

- My partner will take notes to capture the essence of what you say. We will not use your name or in any way attribute what you say to who you are. We are sensitive to the fact that you might not talk as freely about things if you think your comments could later be attributed to you in a negative way.

- The only time we might attribute a name to a statement is in the unlikely event that you indicate that you have evidence of a crime, a security violation, or a serious breach of integrity. If that happens, we will discuss that issue following this session.

- We will take about one hour and 30 minutes of your time.

- Do you have any questions about the ground rules? Great! Let's begin!

# Appendix A

## Sensing Session Diagnostic Test

**1. What is a sensing session?**

a. A group interview.

b. A session where soldiers are allowed to air complaints.

c. A rap session.

d. A command-climate survey.

**2. Which of the following locations is best suited for a sensing session (assuming that the room meets your needs)?**

a. Conference Room in the battalion headquarters.

b. IG's Conference Room.

c. Unit Dining Facility.

d. Classroom away from the unit area.

**3. Which of the classroom set-ups mentioned below is best suited for a sensing session?**

a. Three rows of chairs facing the facilitator.

b. Three rows of tables and chairs facing the facilitator and the recorder.

c. Chairs in a "U" shape with the facilitator and recorder at the open end of the "U."

d. Chairs in an "O" shape with the facilitator and the recorder in the middle of the "O."

**4. What is the best way for selecting individual participants for a sensing session?**

a. Randomly by the IG.

b. By the IG based upon a roster and Social-Security Numbers.

c. By the IG based upon pre-established criteria.

d. By the unit based upon criteria established by the IG.

**5. How many participants are normally in a sensing-session group?**

a. Fifteen for each IG present.

b. Thirty per facilitator.

c. Five to eight.

d. Eight to 15.

**6. The preferred planning time for a sensing session is _____.**

**7. Sensing-session participants can be grouped by:**

a. Grade.

b. Unit.

c. Gender.

d. Race.

e. All of the above.

**8. The feedback you may gather from sensing-session participants can include:**

a. Facts.

b. Opinions.

c. Perceptions.

d. Rumors.

e. All of the above.

**9. Sensing sessions are designed to:**

a. Provide commanders with individual complaints and problems.

b. Provide IG facilitators with the perceptions of particular groups.

c. Assess the climate of the command only.

d. None of the above.

**10. The recorder should:**

a. Never interrupt the sensing session.

b. Periodically summarize the feedback or ask questions for clarification.

c. Covertly take notes.

d. Record all comments verbatim.

**11. Should you allow members of the chain of command to attend the sensing session?**

a. Yes.

b. No.

**12. The facilitator must set the ground rules for the sensing session.**

a. True.

b. False.

**13. The facilitator should inform the group that the sensing session is NOT a complaint session.**

a. True.

b. False.

**14. The facilitator's only job is to gather feedback on the issues and not to teach and train.**

a. True.

b. False.

**15. When closing a sensing session, the facilitator should:**

a. Summarize the key points made during the session.

b. Remind the group about confidentiality.

c. Thank the group for participating.

d. All of the above.

Answer Key
1 - a
2 - d
3 - c
4 - d
5 - d
6 - 90 minutes
7 - e
8 - e
9 - b
10 - b
11 - b
12 - a
13 - a
14 - b
15 - d